

## CLAIMS

1. In a computer database adapted for use by a product component supplier, a method of cataloguing components provided by said supplier and compatibility of said components with a plurality of products, including the steps of:

creating and modifying data relating to components specific to that supplier, said data including component identifiers for said components provided by said supplier,

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creating and modifying a plurality of component groups, each component group containing component identifiers for one or more of said supplier's components of similar type,

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creating and modifying one or more compatibility groups independently within each said components group,

creating and modifying associations between component identifiers and compatibility groups,

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receiving product identifiers created by an external source and assigning each product identifier to a compatibility group within each component group, such that each compatibility group includes one or more product identifiers representing products with similar compatibilities within the respective components groups, and

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providing a search tool whereby said database is queried by product identifier and component group to return one or more component identifiers compatible with the product represented by the product identifier.

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2. In a computer database adapted for use by an administrator and multiple product component suppliers, a method of cataloguing components provided by said

multiple suppliers and compatibility of said components with a plurality of products, including the steps of:

- 5       providing each said supplier with access to a portion of data relating to components specific to that supplier, said data including component identifiers for said components provided by said supplier,
- 10       providing each said supplier with tools for creating and modifying a plurality of component groups, each component group containing component identifiers for one or more of said suppliers components of similar type,
- 15       creating product identifiers relating to products, and exporting said created product identifiers to said multiple suppliers,
- 20       providing each said supplier with tools for creating and modifying one or more compatibility groups independently within each said components group and for creating and modifying associations between component identifiers and compatibility groups,
- 25       said suppliers receiving said exported product identifiers and assigning each product to a compatibility group within each component group, such that each compatibility group includes one or more product identifiers representing products with similar compatibilities within the respective components groups,
- 30       said suppliers exporting said data portion as modified to said administrator, consolidating said data portions received from said suppliers into said database, and
- 30       providing a search tool whereby said database is queried by product identifier and component group to return one or more component identifiers compatible with the product represented by the product identifier.

3. A method according to claim 2 wherein said step of assigning a product to a compatibility group comprises assigning the product to an existing compatibility group, assigning the product to a new compatibility group or assigning the product to  
 5 an unassigned compatibility group.

4. A database system for cataloguing components provided by a product component supplier and compatibility of said components with a plurality of products, including:  
 10 a computer processor,  
 a database readable by said processor,  
 component and product data stored in said database, said data including a  
 15 plurality of component identifiers divided into one or more component groups,  
 each component group including one or more compatibility groups containing product identifiers, and associations between said component identifiers and a compatibility group, and  
 20 a search tool queried by component identifier to return one or more product identifiers compatible with the component represented by the component identifier.

25 5. A database system according to claim 4 wherein said component data includes data relating to components from multiple component suppliers.

6. A database system according to claim 5 further including multiple supplier interfaces each allowing access to a part of the data relating to the components of  
 30 the respective supplier, said supplier interfaces including tools for creating and modifying one or more compatibility groups independently within each said components group, for creating and modifying associations between component

